

James Merrill House  
West Falmouth Road (west side) approximately  
2 miles west of center of Falmouth  
Falmouth Vicinity  
Cumberland County  
Maine

HABS No. ME-115

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ME  
3-FAL.V,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## JAMES MERRILL HOUSE

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Location: West Falmouth Road (west side) approximately 2 miles west of center of Falmouth, Cumberland County, Falmouth Vicinity, Maine.

Present Owner and Occupant: Frederick Foley, Jr., Falmouth.

Present Use: Residence.

Brief Statement of Significance: One of the earliest known houses north of York County, built in 1738 by James Merrill. (Records, York County Courthouse). It is a good example of a mid-18th century Maine two-story gable house. Of special interest are fireplaces, stairways, and trim. The survey is limited to 18th century portions of the building.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: Fred Foley, Jr. bought the house from Mrs. Alice Dowden Ricker, a direct descendant of James Merrill, in July 1958. The house had not been out of the family meanwhile.
- B. Date of Erection: 1738. James Merrill bought "farm" from General Waldo in 1730. Noted in document several times that he owned farm on northeast bank of Presumscot River. Built house in 1738 (records in York County Courthouse, Alfred, Maine). Another source (infra), however, states that James Merrill took over a Garrison house already in Falmouth in 1730. This was later destroyed. The present house is obviously pre-1750 in style on the basis of proportions and details. There are no features of a Garrison house in the building, thus corroborating the fact the Garrison House which Merrill took over in 1730 was not this one, but the one which was later destroyed. It is difficult to imagine a house of this size in this area not being that of James Merrill, a prominent early settler. Houses of his sons, which are both story-and-a-half structures, were all in the immediate environs. Two are still in good state of preservation.)
- C. Alterations and additions: Wing added in 1790. All elements of the main section of the house are original, except for fireplace trim in ell which was rotted and replaced by trim duplicating the original. The stairway from the "borning room" from the former kitchen was considerably widened before 1958--creating the effect of almost one room. Marks in wood

indicate the former presence of a curved, built-in cupboard. A deeply paneled double door was found neatly put away in boxes in the attic. The present owners feel that this was done when the ell was put on, probably in 1790. He also feels that this was the original front door since it fitted perfectly. It has been used to replace the later Victorian door.

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D. Unusual Features:

1. In the ell, a high mantel over the wide opening from the present dining room into the fireplace area, and closets flanking the fireplace.
2. The "hat box" in the stair well.
3. The existence of free-hand decorative painting in front hall, in excellent condition similar to that at the Reverend Foxcroft House in New Gloucester (1765) and to the small section recently uncovered in the Means House, Stroudwater (recorded by HABS in 1936 [Survey No. ME-5]). Mrs. Nina Fletcher Little, in her authoritative Mrs. Little American Decorative Wall Painting (New York: Old Sturbridge Village and Studio Publications, 1952), mentions the Foxcroft paintings, but does not know of the Merrill or Means examples. She attributes the West Gloucester work to one Phillip Rose of Portland, sometime of West Falmouth and New Gloucester. The attribution to Rose of this free-hand decorative painting might well be risked.

- E. Sources of Information: Merrill, Samuel. "A Merrill Memorial." A manuscript in the collection of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, 1917-26. Contains extensive quotations from wills, deeds, etc.

York County Courthouse, Alfred, Maine. Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Foley, Jr., the present owners, have copies of documents in the courthouse which indicate that the house was built in 1738.

Prepared by Samuel M. Green  
Wesleyan University  
July 1962

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This structure is exceptionally well preserved mid-18th century farmhouse with a limited

amount of alterations. It is particularly noteworthy for its paneling, painted wall decoration, frontispiece, and fireplace in ell (present dining room).

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2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. This structure is a two-story house with ell parallel to the road. Modern appendages not covered in this survey (kitchen, garage, etc.).
2. Foundation: The main house and ell have low granite and fieldstone foundation walls. The round arch-vault opening in central fireplace foundation is braced by concrete block partition, wooden boards embedded in masonry. Floor beams, joists hewn, mortise and tenon joints. Fireplace in ell was originally on flagstone foundation.
3. Wall construction: Frame covered with clapboarding. About 4'-0" on centers (long feathered, lapped joints, nailed with old nails to studs). Modern blown insulation in exterior walls. Featheredged sheathing behind clapboards in attic.
4. Stoops, bulkhead: Stone steps and stoops at two entrances; bulkhead to cellar has stone walls and steps. Wooden hatch cover (two doors).
5. Chimneys: Central chimney: Brick about 4'-0" square. Modern heater stack into separate flue. Ell chimney: Exterior, brick, rebuilt 1958.
6. Openings; doorways and doors:
  - a. Frontispiece: Elliptical arched opening with louvered fan, and four reeded pilasters on plinths. Two, three-panel wooden doors; three-light side lights over single wooden panels. Wooden threshold.
  - b. Ell, doorway: Wooden cornice, simple entablature, three-light fixed transom. Door has 12 lights.
7. Openings; windows and shutters:
  - a. Main house: Nine-over-six lights and six-over-six lights, double-hung windows, one nine-light casement. All new glass. Simple trim and wooden louvered shutters.

b. Ell: Nine-over-six lights on first floor, six-over-six lights on second floor, double-hung windows on both floors. Wooden louvered shutters and simple trim.

8. Roof: Gable roofs on main house and ell. Wooden shingles. Boxed eave, simple wooden cornice. Wood gutters and metal downspouts. Attic framing is mortised and tenon jointed with wooden prop.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor Plan:

- a. Cellar: Full cellar under main house, accessible from ell (dining room).
- b. First floor: Central entrance stair hall with stair in front of chimney; rooms each side, and "winter kitchen" across rear.  
First-floor ell: dining room, stairs to cellar, stairs to second floor.
- c. Second floor: Central stair hall with stairs to attic. Bedroom, hall, and bath over winter kitchen; bedroom over dining room in ell and stairs to first floor.

2. Stairways:

- a. Main house: Right hand "U"-shaped stairs, two landings; turned newels and balusters (two per tread), molded rail, mortised and tenon joints with dowel fasteners.
- b. Ell: Stairs to second floor, removed from burning room. "L"-shaped stair, one landing. Enclosed by partitions.

3. Flooring: Random width pine boards. Modern ceramic tile in baths.

4. Walls: Plaster with hair binder on wooden lath. Paneled wooden wainscot (horizontal featheredged). Featheredged paneling on all fireplace walls, and on stair hall partitions. Free hand painted pattern in left front room.

5. Ceiling: New plaster (replaced clam shell plaster). Beamed ceiling in dining room.

6. Doors: Four-panel wooden doors, mortise and tenon with  
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7. Trim: Large amounts of featheredged paneling, some  
beaded edge siding, seat in recessed fireplace. "Hat  
cupboard" off main stair hall. Modern interior shutters  
in old borning room. Boxed corner posts.
8. Hardware: Iron H and HL hinges. Original fireplace  
hardware. Hooks in ceiling of summer kitchen for loom.
9. Lighting: Electric. No ceiling fixtures.
10. Heating: Hot water, baseboard radiation. Fireplaces  
are useable in major rooms. Exceptionally well preserved  
fireplace and "beehive" oven in winter kitchen. Fire-  
place in first floor of ell in recess formed by closet,  
stair, and dropped ceiling. Seat at one side.
- D. Site: The structure is located on a rise on the west side  
of the road to West Falmouth, two miles west of town clerk's  
office in Falmouth. Modern kitchen ell (two story) and three-  
car garage, swimming pool, and cabana. 150 acre site. House  
on rise with hedge paralleling road, stone fences each side,  
stable across West Falmouth Road.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, Architect  
National Park Service  
August 1962